

# Washington State Patrol Media Release

*Chief Ronal W. Serpas*

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**Date July 24, 2002**

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Washington State Patrol Chief Ronal W. Serpas' Open Editorial Letter**

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) is staffed with over 1,100 officers and 1,100 professional staff who are dedicated to providing the finest in quality programs and services. Our personnel perform a wide variety of activities (e.g., Fire Marshals, Detectives, Communications Officers, Budget Analysts, Forensic Scientists, and Commercial Vehicle Enforcement) to help improve the quality of life in Washington State.

Any reduction of collisions results in less injuries, fewer roadway deaths, and less traffic congestion. Traffic congestion caused by collisions has an enormous cost to us all. The WSP believes that through **enforcement, education, and assistance**, we can make a difference in roadway safety for our children, families, and friends.

The WSP has refocused on its core traffic law enforcement activities (DUI, aggressive driving, seatbelt compliance, and dangerous speeding) believed to be most likely to maximize the intended results of saving lives, reducing injuries, protecting property, and facilitating the flow of traffic.

Beginning in January of 2002, we initiated weekly accountability meetings within the WSP. At these meetings, District and Division Commanders report to the Chief on all levels of the agency they are responsible for and answer in-depth questions about how they are: accomplishing their mission, creatively solving problems with communities, working with other criminal justice system partners, and a full accounting of their budget management and expenditures. These weekly accountability meetings are making a difference!

I would like to share with you some exciting information in just one area of our accountability lead strategy of providing the best service: roadway safety from January 2002 to June 2002, compared to the same period in 2001.

- 1,499 more DUI's ere arrested, a 23% increase
- 44,241 more speeding tickets were issued, a 58% increase
- 13,377 more seatbelt tickets were issued, a 65% increase
- 7,096 more traffic stops for aggressive driving, a 109% increase
- District Warrant Apprehension Teams (reinstated in early 2002) arrested 899 court ordered warrant violators, with \$1.8 million of bail/bond subject to forfeiture
- Fatal collisions reported to the WSP are down 12%, or 18 fewer collisions
- Injury collisions reported to the WSP are down 4%, or 203 fewer injury collisions

Equally important, every month our troopers average over 13,000 self-initiated assists to help our friends, families, and children (changing a flat tire, providing directions, transporting motorist for auto parts, gas, etc.). These self-initiated assists do not include the monthly average of 19,000 calls of citizens for roadside assistance from the WSP.

Combined together, this means that over *1,000 times per day our troopers are helping motorists*. We fully support this effort to assist the motoring public.

Traffic stops are an effective method of providing a safer motoring environment, but also serve as an effective means of crime control. The transportation of narcotics on our highways *continues* to be a significant concern to all law enforcement. District 3 (Yakima) and District 2 (Seattle) have fielded Serious Highway Crime Apprehension Teams. This program has made 178 misdemeanor drug arrests, 36 felony drug arrests, seized 14 vehicles, and confiscated 205 pounds of cocaine and 8 pounds of marijuana. The efforts of this handful of troopers and K9 Narcotics handlers have been very successful in the first six months of this year and is currently being expanded to all Districts.

With the recent focus on our activity, there has been the inevitable question of whether or not the WSP has a quota system, or are we sacrificing quality for quantity. That is a fair question. Given the data generated by the hard work of our troopers, I believe it is clear that our efforts are directed, and clearly relate to, improving the quality of life our friends, family, and children can enjoy when we use the state's roadway and transportation system.

In our core mission of traffic law enforcement (DUI, seatbelts, aggressive driving, and dangerous speeding), the evidence is overwhelming: preventable and individual driving behaviors and decisions cause loss of life and life-altering injuries to our friends, family, and children. For example, we know that in 2001, 215 drivers who had been drinking were responsible for 230 deaths (of the 649 total roadway deaths recorded), compared to 179 murders committed in the state. We will continue to fully support strict enforcement of laws that can make our loved ones, our friends, and ourselves safer.

As it relates to other traffic law enforcement activity (general speeding, lane travel, following too closely, etc.), we know that our troopers, exercising professional discretion, make decisions to issue tickets with fines in less than 50% of all speeding stops. Further, we know that in 70% of all traffic violations observed by troopers, a warning is issued instead of a ticket with fine. We fully support the exercise of this professional discretion to educate the motoring public, or enforce as appropriate.

The distribution of traffic fines is controlled by state law. Approximately 57% of all ticket fines are remitted to the local jurisdiction where the WSP citation was issued, and 43% of the fines collected are remitted to the statewide Public Safety and Education Account (PSEA). PSEA account funds to the WSP accounts for less than 5% of the department's overall budget, funding programs such as the Crime Lab, the Methamphetamine Response Teams, and the Criminal Identification Section.

Finally, as long as we must count the senseless and preventable deaths and injuries due to DUI, seatbelt violations, aggressive driving, and dangerous speed, we think it is important to count the number of times we believe our troopers can make a difference through **enforcement, education, and assistance**.

The WSP fully appreciates the support of the citizens of Washington, Governor Locke, and the Legislature to help us perform our mission. I strongly believe the strength of our department is all the men and women who have devoted their lives to public service. It is truly my honor to be a member of the Washington State Patrol. These early results are encouraging, but there is much work left to be done. We are making a difference!

Chief Ronal W. Serpas  
Washington State Patrol

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